

## CW & YOU

By Philip Cala-Lazar, K9PL

Now that the furor over restructuring has cooled a bit, I'd like to comment on the essential nature of CW in amateur radio. Putting aside all nostalgic notions of telegraphy in the history of ham radio, it's the practical nature of that mode that keeps it at the forefront of many hams' HF operation.

If one of the purposes of restructuring was to bolster the existing population of HF operators, then the physical nature of those frequency allocations must be met to successfully operate on them. Operation on the shortwave bands requires, on the transmitting end, an efficient antenna and sufficient RF power to initiate and maintain a QSO. Though more Americans may be living in single-family homes than ever before, many of these homes are located in communities where antennas are severely restricted or prohibited. Additionally, not all hams fortunate enough to live in unrestricted areas have the means, family circumstances or desire to erect sizable antenna arrays and towers. How then for the newly minted HF operator to utilize the expanded privileges granted by his license?

Simple wire, stealth, or indoor antennas are the usual solutions to these situations. All these antennas work, and will net you as many contacts as you have the time to work them. However, for the stealth, and especially for the indoor antenna user, health and safety concerns dictate that minimal power be used. For the stealth antenna user, TVI will quickly reveal your clandestine operation, and for the indoor antenna user, only the foolhardy would operate near even moderate RF power levels.

There is a solution for the ham with less than ideal operating circumstances and who, by choice or necessity, uses low RF output power and that is: CW!

The oldest amateur radio mode (ignoring spark!) provides benefits for even the newest operator. CW operation does not require the latest, nor the most feature-

laden (read expensive) rigs available and bare-bones equipment will do the job. Over the past 24 years, I've QSO'd hams using everything from QRP kit rigs to decades old boat anchors to brand-new, multi-kilobuck, state-of-the-art transceivers, and you just can't tell the difference at the receiving end.

The majority of the hams I've worked on CW run their rigs at well below their rated maximum power output and that means fewer RFI problems, a longer life for their rigs and smaller utility bills. CW's biggest advantage, as any experienced op will tell you, however, is enhanced operating ability. CW often gets through when SSB won't. For weak, or marginal signal work; on noisy, crowded bands; and for less than contest-quality stations, CW garners QSOs not possible using voice modes. Indeed, for many hams, the CW mode of operation provides them their only means of getting, and staying, on-the-air as active members of the amateur radio community.

Another advantage not often noted even by CW proponents, is the comfort and amicability level of the non-hams in your household. When using headphones, CW is a "silent" mode, no one can hear you operating/contesting in the wee hours of the morning when all else are sleeping. Try that when repetitively shouting your call and exchange into a microphone during your favorite DX contest!

All the modes available to us as licensed amateur radio operators deserve the spectrum allotted them, and all have their advocates and devotees. Give CW a try. It doesn't require much cash outlay or an ornate installation, but the dividends it pays in operating pleasure will surprise and delight you.